

Saint Pius V



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(Author Unknown)

COVER ART: Portrait of "Pope Pius V" by Scipione Pulzone (1550 – 1598) was painted between 1576 and 1580. The oil on panel work depicts the Pontiff wearing a camauro and a papal mozzetta. The painting resides in the Puskin Museum in Moscow. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art and is in the public domain. *



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REJOICE, O happy children of Dominic, and burn torches in honor of Pius the Fifth! Be glad, O Mother Church, so long weeping at the River of Babylon! Let all the heavenly hosts exult, and reduplicate our festive Alleluia to Pius.” Thus begins the Vespers of Saint Pius and it sounds the dominant note of his entire office. Well indeed might the family of Saint Dominic rejoice, that family which has given to the Church so many eminent canonists, profound philosophers, learned theologians, and saints, for in Pius the Fifth all these qualities were uniquely combined in a high degree, and, moreover, he is honored by the universal Church as Pope and Saint. The Church has good cause also to honor him as her valiant defender, for he came to her in a time of great tribulation and distress, and proved himself to be her stalwart and faithful son. All of Christendom owes a debt of gratitude to this saintly “Father of Nations,” who, stern in the path of righteousness, yet lowly in his deep submissive reverence for the mandates of God, has done so much to strengthen the Christian religion and to extend the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

It is proverbial that, every time the Church was passing through periods of storm and stress, God raised up mighty and valiant leaders to guide her safely over the troubled waters into the harbor of peace and calm. So, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, one of the most trying through which the Church Militant has had to pass, Almighty God sent a new Moses, not only to deliver His Church from the bondage of political entanglements into which human ambition had betrayed her, but also to save European civilization from being supplanted by Asiatic fanaticism.

The Ghislieri family, once richly endowed but having become impoverished by the civil wars, which had desolated Lombardy in the fifteenth century, came to hide their poverty in Bosco, a small town in northern Italy. There on January 17th, usually a chill and gloomy month in southern Europe, Dominica Augeria, wife of Paul Ghislieri, gave birth to a baby boy they called Michael. This child is the subject of our story. Little is known of Dominica, the boy’s mother, beyond the fact that she instilled into the heart of her son a fervent spirit of piety toward God and a very tender devotion to His Blessed Mother, virtues that characterized Michael’s life as a Dominican, as a Cardinal, and as Vicar of Christ. Although wealth was no longer the Ghislieris’, their only possessions being a tiny dwelling, a little vineyard, and a small flock of sheep, yet a better inheritance descended on the future Saint—an inheritance of piety, resignation, and steadfast endeavor to fulfill the adorable Will of God by daily labor.

Michael was a gentle and serious child, peacefully happy in his quiet way, and never boisterous in his amusements. As he advanced in years, he found his greatest pleasure in reading. When at school he was pointed out as a boy of unusual talent and application.

Paul Ghislieri was too poor to indulge ambition for his son. Instead of continuing his studies, Michael was required to learn a trade so he could aid his father in providing a livelihood for the family. Thus spoke both the parents. Their little son listened with sinking heart, for another voice had already sounded in his ears, and his daily prayer was for strength and opportunity to follow that voice. He was longing, as only the chosen of God can long, to consecrate himself to Christ. At this time, Michael was twelve years old, tall for his age, slight of build, with fine, clear-cut features, and luminous eyes full of intelligence, honesty, and enthusiasm. Just as plans were being completed for him to enter a new life in the world, strangely and unexpectedly, the door of the sanctuary was thrown open for him.

There was no seminary and no monastery near Bosco. Consequently, no priest or religious was available to give Michael a helping hand. However, one day, when returning from school, Michael met two Dominican Friars who chanced to be passing through the village. Seizing the opportunity for which he had so long waited, he timidly approached them. With great respect and great earnestness, Michael told them the secret desire of his heart and begged them to take him to their convent. They talked to him and questioned him closely. They were so impressed by his simple candor and innocence, by the premature wisdom shown in his answers, and reflected in his questions, that they agreed to receive him as a pupil, with a view to testing his vocation. This unexpected fulfillment of his cherished hopes seemed to Michael an answer to his prayers, and his heart overflowed with gratitude. He asked to be allowed a delay of a few minutes in which to make known to his parents his secret desires and the opportunity offered for their realization. This granted, he hurried home, and, in a rather excited frame of mind, opened his heart to his father and mother and begged leave to go. They were not a little astonished at their son's eagerness, but, having had long noted the signs of a vocation that were so abundantly evident in him, they were prepared to make the sacrifice. They willingly consented, thanking God for their son's vocation, and expressed a wish to see him clothed in the habit of Saint Dominic. Again, the boy's heart bounded for gladness, and, bidding his parents a hasty good-bye, he ran back to his new friends. They were traveling on foot and had a great distance to go, so the poor little fellow could scarcely have been able to keep up with them had he not held onto the cloak of one of the Fathers. With this help, he followed them to their convent at Voghera, a town in Lombardy.

From the day Michael entered the priory, he was serenely happy in his new surroundings and applied himself to the duties of his calling with an eagerness that excited both the admiration of his superiors and the emulation of his fellow-novices. His probation was a short duration, for he was soon sent to the priory of Vigevano to make his novitiate. There the novices regarded him as one who had advanced far in the science of the saints. He was habitually silent and recollected. He was always prudent, docile, and humble. He was vigilantly observant of rules and regulations. In May, 1520, Michael received the

Dominican habit, and a year later made his religious profession. The next seven years were spent in the study of philosophy and theology at the Convents of Fermo, Pavia, Ravenna, and Raggio. He studied as the saints have always studied, with continual elevation of mind to the Throne of Light, frequently interrupting his work to pour forth his soul in fervent prayer. He had no sooner finished his studies than he was appointed professor of theology, and his first direction to his class was this: "The most powerful aid we can bring to this study is the practice of earnest prayer. The more closely the mind is united to God, the richer will be the stores of light that follow its researches."

In his twenty-fifth year, Michael was ordained to the priesthood and, although he had not seen his parents since leaving Bosco twelve years before, even then he dreaded yielding so much to nature as a visit home. It was only in obedience to his superiors that he was required to visit them. So, he set out to say his first Mass in the old parish church of his native village, where it had been his custom to pray at his mother's side. He arrived at Bosco only to find that the town had been burned to the ground some months before by the French troops of Francis I on their way to Pavia. All the inhabitants had fled. It was a surprising homecoming. Hearing that his family and friends had taken refuge in the village of Sesodia, some miles away, he sought and found them there, and in the parish church of that village, surrounded by his own people, he celebrated his first solemn Mass.

During the next fifteen years, Father Ghislieri held various offices in the Order. He was successively elected Prior of the Convents of Vigevano, Soncino, and Alba. He emphasized a particular point in his conferences to his religious subjects--the point upon which Saint Dominic himself laid so much stress: that they should take great care to preserve intact the religious spirit while mixing with the world for the salvation of souls. As salt is quickly converted into its first element, water, when it is mixed with the water, so too, religious, who, as the salt of the earth, are withdrawn by God from the waters of the world, but too easily absorbed again into their native element with all its vices and temptations, if they return to the world without sufficient and just cause.

In works of charity, Michael was indefatigable. In the interests of charity, he took long and tiresome journeys, invariably traveling on foot and carrying his bag on his shoulders. He was always ready to give comfort, help, or advice to the weak and suffering, as though he had learned by experience to enter into every trial, and knew the most efficacious soothing for every sorrow. In 1543, he was summoned to the Provincial Chapter at Parma, and there he refuted the errors of the Lutherans in a masterly thesis dealing with many points of false doctrine. As a consequence of this defense, Michael was sought as a confessor by several persons of note who needed especially enlightened direction. Among them was the Governor of Milan. This entailed a frequent journey of twenty miles, which the Saint made on foot, and so poorly clad that he must often have suffered extremely from the piercing cold and heavy rains of winter.

In 1543, the heresy of Luther was beginning to make its way into the hitherto untainted regions of the South, spreading the poison of falsehood through the inborn piety of the Italians, prompt measures of defense became necessary. The cardinals of the Holy Office in Rome, remembering Father Ghislieri's brilliant defense of the truth at the Dominican Chapter of Parma and relying on his reputation for prudence and firmness, sent him to Coma in the capacity of Inquisitor. No other inducement would have drawn him from his retreat, but this was a powerful incentive. He was called to a post of danger, difficulties, and thankless labor; for, second only to the hatred the innovators attached to the Office of the Supreme Pontiff, was the hatred they associated with the Office of Inquisitor. Yet, he accepted the charge in the hope that his efforts might prevent the plague of heresy from spreading among the children of God.

Some, while admiring Saint Pius's administration as Pope, accuse Saint Pius of undue rigor and intolerance as Inquisitor. Yet, if they will follow him faithfully through those disagreeable and arduous tasks, they will soon acknowledge their mistake. Instead of finding him overbearing and intolerant they will find him going about humbly, prayerfully, and patiently from city to city and from hamlet to hamlet, examining the faithful, arguing with the heretics, testing, judging, and reproving with all kindness, but yet with apostolic firmness. The threats of wealthy and influential opponents did not hinder this man of God in his work. On one occasion, he was cited before a civil tribunal as a disturber of the peace. Although warned that assassins lay in wait for him on the road, he went, nevertheless. And, as he stood before the judge, his serene unruffled gaze meeting the angry eyes of his accusers, the magistrate, as if speechless with rage at the tranquil indifference of the champion of truth, rose and, glaring furiously at the friar, left the court in haste. It is true he used stringent means to suppress new doctrines and often was instrumental in imposing severe punishments upon obstinate heretics.

However, to form a proper appreciation of his actions we must judge them in the light of the conditions prevailing at the time. Most of the governments were still Catholic and, consequently, any violation of Church laws or any attempt to sully the purity of Church doctrine was regarded not only as an offense against the Church, but also as an offense against the State. Whatever tended to undermine obedience to the Church was regarded as subversive of the peace and prosperity of the State. Hence, the Inquisitor, by pronouncing a person a heretic, rendered that person subject to the penalties imposed for violation of the laws of the State. If these penalties were too severe, the blame is to be laid at the door of the State that had established those penalties, not the door of the Inquisitor. The age of which we speak was one of force and violence and the sanction that was then attached to all laws was more severe than that which is attached to them at the present day. Consequently, if we view conduct of Saint Pius in the light and spirit of the age in which he lived, we can find no sufficient reason for the harsh criticisms that have been made against him and against many others who held the office of Inquisitor.

Two examples will suffice to give an idea of his methods.

One of the most mischievous publications of the sectaries (protestant nonconformists) had been sent to a merchant at Coma for distribution among the inhabitants. Father Ghislieri, in virtue of his office, seized the books and refused them to the merchant who claimed them as his property. The merchant had friends in the Cathedral Chapter and appealed to the Vicar Capitular for redress. The merchant's appeal was successful and the Inquisitor, to warn the faithful of the false doctrine within the consignment of books and to put the faithful on their guard against the disseminators of evil, immediately excommunicated all parties concerned. He was assailed by the mob with stones and, when threatened to be thrown into a well, he calmly answered, "That shall be as God wills." The Governor of Milan summoned him to answer for his conduct and threatened him with imprisonment, but the servant of God had procured a mule and was far on his way to Rome before the Governor found a means to carry out his threat. An incident in connection with this journey of Saint Pius is worthy of note. Father Ghislieri, travel-soiled and exhausted, reached the Eternal City late on Christmas Eve in 1515. Quite naturally, he went directly to his own monastery of Santa Sabina for lodgings. No notice of his coming had been given and the prior not knowing the Saint and distrusting the account of the poverty-marked wayfarer, asked, "What is the reason for your visit? Will you present yourself to the Cardinals in the hope of being elected Pope?" "I have come," answered the future Pontiff, "in the interests of the Church. I shall go home again as soon as I have been directed how to act. I ask only a few days of hospitality for myself and my poor worn-out mule." He was assigned a room next to that which had been occupied by Saint Dominic. (Both rooms are now venerated as household sanctuaries.) His case having been reported to the Cardinals of the Holy Office, they approved of his action and, with full confidence, sent him back to his perilous and difficult charge. In returning, he was advised to lay aside his Dominican habit and travel in secular disguise, since his life was in danger. He refused, saying, "I accepted death with my commission, I can never die in a holier cause."

A second example begins with a certain Jew, who had become a Catholic while still a boy. He had entered the Order of Friars Minor and became a popular preacher. In time, his discourses became tainted with heresy and the young friar was imprisoned. He, however, retracted and was released and returned to his Order. As this was his second conviction of heresy, he was more obstinate and it seemed there was no hope of his escaping death by fire, the penalty for a relapsed heretic. When walking through the prison, Father Ghislieri was struck by the profound misery of the young Franciscan. Father Ghislieri spoke to him kindly and begged him to confide in him as a friend. After long persuasion, the young man told his name and history, but refused to renounce his error. The Inquisitor doubled his prayers, every day offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for his conversion, and daily visited him, speaking to him with tenderness and

sympathy. At last, the persistency of the Saint prevailed. The prisoner, bursting into tears, expressed the wish to repent and to prove his sincerity by a life of penance. Saint Pius hastened to the Pope and sought and obtained his pardon. The prisoner made full abjuration of his heresy, confessed to his preserver, and received absolution. The Inquisitor next undertook to provide for the future of his penitent, who refused to return to the Order he had so shamefully disgraced. He received him into the Order of Preachers, clothing him with one of his own habits and adopting him as his spiritual son. This young friar later became the celebrated Biblical scholar, Sixtus of Siena.

Such were the methods used by Father Ghislieri, the Inquisitor, in his difficult and delicate task, with the result that perhaps he did more than anyone else to check the tide of heresy and to keep Lutheranism from taking root in Italy.

In 1555, Cardinal Caraffa ascended the Papal Throne, as Paul IV, and one of his first acts was to appoint Father Ghislieri Bishop of Nepi and Sutri, near Rome. Tears were not common with Father Ghislieri, but at this news they flowed freely, while he implored the Holy Father to choose another prelate and let him go back to his convent, "to live and die as a Dominican." The Pope merely silenced the appeal with an express command to accept the charge; and, when later on Bishop Ghislieri begged to resign his diocese, the Holy Father answered, "I will bind you with so strong a chain that even after my death you will never be free to return to your cloister."

This was a clear indication of the next step, and shortly afterward Bishop Ghislieri was peremptorily ordered to accept, without offering any opposition, the dignity of the Cardinalate. He was not grateful for the promotion and would not express gratitude when he did not feel it. Thus, he remained silent when urged to offer the customary thanks for the honor received. It fell, then, to the members of the Sacred College to thank the Holy Father for giving them so worthy a colleague.

He chose the Dominican Church Santa Maria sopra Minerva for his Titular Church. He also wished to be called Cardinal Alessandrino instead of Ghislieri, as the former name had been given to him by the Father Provincial on the happy day of his religious profession, and it seemed like a last link to the order from which he had been so reluctantly separated. Though Cardinal, he still wore the Dominican habit, observed the fasts and other austerities of the Dominican Rule, and lived in the simplicity that characterized his former life. When employing servants he would say to them, "If you come to me, remember you will not live as they do, in Cardinals' palaces. My household is like a monastery, and you must be prepared to live like lay brothers." Yet he was kind and indulgent to the members of his household.

On the accession of Pius IV, in December of 1559, Cardinal Alessandrino (Ghislieri) was confirmed in the Office of Supreme Inquisitor, the office to which he had been appointed

by Paul IV, and appointed to the See of Mandovi. There, he restored the purity of faith and discipline so gravely impaired by the wars of Piedmont. Frequently called to Rome for consultation, he displayed the same zeal and adherence to principle that had characterized his other activities. He offered unceasing opposition to the appointment of Ferdinand de Medici, then only thirteen years old, as a member of the Sacred College, declaring that the Church needed not children, but men of mature years to sustain her reputation for wisdom and virtue. It was also due in great measure to his decided stand that the endeavors of Maximilian II, Emperor of Germany, to abolish ecclesiastical celibacy were defeated.

Pius IV died December 9, 1565, and on December 26th, a conclave was opened for the election of his successor.

Never was the choice of a Sovereign Pontiff of more vital importance. A man of no ordinary ability was required to meet the exigencies of the time and to carry out with firmness and discretion the discipline and regulations of the Council of Trent. Happily, the most influential person in the conclave was the great and saintly Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Charles Borromeo. He placed the name of Cardinal Alessandrino as a man capable of fulfilling the office and, after a little balloting, his nominee received the number of votes necessary for election. Cardinal Borromeo and two other Cardinals were delegated to make known to the Pope-elect the choice of the conclave. They anticipated his objections, and carrying him from his cell bore him in their arms to the chapel, where he received the homage of the assembled Cardinals. "Pronounce your acceptance, Most Holy Father," commanded Cardinal Borromeo, "in the name of the Church." But the answer was more startling than words, for the strong, self-controlled Cardinal Alessandrino burst into tears, and his whole form shook with sobs while he repeated the words, "I cannot; I am not worthy." It was long before they could calm him, long before the ring could be placed upon his finger and before he could be prevailed upon to pronounce the word "Acceptamus." "We accept."

Prudence, learning, and sanctity ascended the throne in the person of Pius V. When the report had reached his ears that the Romans dreaded the inflexible severity of the new Sovereign, he exclaimed, "Ah! So they think I shall rule them with an iron sway. God grant me the grace to so act that they may grieve more for my death than for my election." And so, indeed, it came to pass, for all classes from the highest to the lowest, even those who had expected little thoughtful generosity, learned to love the great Pontiff for his unobtrusive benevolence.

The Chief Shepherd's eye looked down from his watchtower on the seven hills towards a dreary and woeful scene. Rome lay desolate under the curse of her children's sins. Everywhere usury, assassination, and immorality in a multitude of forms disgraced the Papal Domains. The scepter of the Holy Roman Empire was held by the weak and

vacillating Emperor Maximilian II. In France, the wily Queen Regent, Catherine de Medici, had been intriguing with the rapidly increasing Huguenot party, in spite of its avowedly anarchistic and anti-Catholic tenets. The throne of Spain was filled by Phillip II, who unquestionably had the welfare of religion at heart, but was swayed by personal and national ambitions, which too often injured its interests. Sebastian, King of Portugal, had not yet completed his fourteenth year. Elizabeth ruled in England, and had already severed it from the unity of Christendom. Such was the state of affairs in the wide family of which Pius V had now become father.

Divine Providence, however, had provided for him a corps of saints as co-workers. Saint Phillip Neri went daily through the streets winning thousands by the sweetness of his charity, and preaching everywhere frequent communion and continual prayer as the great means of spiritual regeneration. Saint Charles Borromeo, the model of Christian pastors, co-operated intimately with the Pontiff, in whose elevation he had been the principal instrument. Saint Francis Borgia was General of the Society of Jesus, which had recently been founded, and whose founder, Saint Ignatius, had just passed from this life. Saint Stanislaus Kostka was on the threshold of his saintly life, and was soon succeeded by Saint Aloysius. In Spain, Saint John of God and Saint John of the Cross were laboring for the restoration of primitive fervor, and Saint Theresa had just laid the foundation for a marvelous reform aided by Saint Peter of Alcantara, who had died two years before the accession of Saint Pius.

The first public measure of the new Pope indicated what was to be the spirit of his reign. The money, which is scattered among the populace upon installation of new Pontiffs, was instead carefully distributed among those in greatest need and whose weakness or modesty would have prevented them from gaining anything in the general scramble. The thousand crowns usually spent on a banquet to the Cardinals and Ambassadors present at the coronation were sent as alms to hospitals and to the poorest convents of the city. "For I know," said the Pope, "that God will not call me to account for suppressing a feast for the wealthy, but he may punish me severely if I neglect His poor."

It was soon manifest that the general reform contemplated by the Pope was to begin with reformation of his own court and capital. He began his reign with exceptional fasts and prayer, by commending himself to the suffrages of the various religious communities, and by publishing a jubilee to draw down upon himself and the Church all the graces so urgently needed at that critical time. He then assembled all the members of his household, made known to them what he expected of each according to his rank and laid down special rules for their conduct. He fixed a certain time for evening prayers, at which he himself never failed to be present. He wore his Dominican habit under his pontifical vestments and slept upon the same hard pallet that he had used in his cell. Not only were the ordinary fasts of the Church observed in his household, but such was the

frugality of his table that its daily cost did not exceed a testone, or about thirty-two cents of our money. Instead of armorial bearings, the following verse was engraved on his seal, "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy Commandments." A crucifix stood always on his table, at the foot of which were inscribed these words, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In a consistory held expressly for the purpose he addressed a fatherly exhortation to the Cardinals and Prelates, in which he explained to them the surest way to appease the wrath of God and to stay the progress of heretics and infidels was that each should begin by setting in order his own conscience and his own house. "It is to you," he said, "that Jesus Christ addresses these words, 'You are the Light of the world; you are the Salt of the earth; therefore, enlighten the people by the purity of your lives and by the brilliancy of your holiness! God does not ask from you mere ordinary virtue, but downright perfection!'"

A very annoying source of evil was the intercourse of Christian families with the Jews. The Jews took advantage of the simple credulity of the Christians. Practicing under a fake science of astrology, they introduced among Christians various kinds of immorality, while at the same time they ruined Christian fortunes by usury. The new Pope, therefore, banished all Jews from every part of the territories of the Church, except the Jewish merchants at Rome and Ancona, where their presence was necessary for keeping up the commerce of the Levant. However, even in these places they were confined to separate quarters of the city as a precaution against their evil influences.

The daily assassinations and robberies committed in his domains did not escape the vigilant eye of the new Sovereign. By an agreement made with the viceroys of Naples and Tuscany, it was enacted that bandits should be seized and executed wherever they should be found without distinction of territory. By these prompt measures, the Ecclesiastical States were soon freed from this scourge. He exhorted unceasingly all magistrates and rulers to justice, and enacted many laws to improve public morals. These laws were enforced with so much vigor that within less than a year the whole aspect of affairs in the Papal States had changed.

Saint Pius' next concern was to procure recognition of the disciplinary decrees of the Council of Trent by all Catholic nations. A few of them, among which Portugal, the Republic of Venice, and the Catholic cantons of Switzerland were honorably distinguished, yielded instant obedience. France and Germany temporized and hesitated, and even Phillip imposed certain restrictions upon the publications of the decrees in Spain, Flanders, and the Italian States. The Pope's pen was constantly in hand directing nuncios, explaining the Church's canons, and reasoning with and exhorting ambassadors. He also used his growing influence with the bishops to hasten the establishment of

diocesan seminaries, for hitherto the universities had been the only educational centers for ecclesiastics. He defrayed the expenses of students who were unable to educate themselves for the priesthood from the Papal treasury.

In September of 1566, the Catechism of the Council of Trent was issued. The new edition of the Breviary, revised by the Saint, was published in July of 1568, and the revised Missal was published two years later. By a special decree, those religious orders that could show a rite of their own in existence for more than two hundred years, approved by the Holy See, were permitted to retain it. Thus, the Benedictines, Carthusians, Cistercians, Carmelites, and Dominicans kept their ancient office and Mass. Church music received much attention. Being solicitous that the Real Presence in the churches should be hailed with the homage of sacred music, he ordered the old Gregorian plain chant to be restored in its simplicity, and appointed Palestrina master of the orchestra in the Papal Chapel.

To appreciate his worldwide political activities in the interests of humanity, it would be necessary to study carefully the eighty volumes of the Pope's correspondence preserved in the Vatican.

Saint Pius, as Supreme Pontiff, religiously kept the resolution he had made when Cardinal, never to make his own exaltation a means of advancing his family.

He was, however, prevailed upon to entrust the administration of temporal affairs to his great nephew, Michael Bonnelli, who was chosen, not due to his relationship, but due to his admirable fitness to fulfill the office. Saint Pius made Bonnelli steward of the ecclesiastical domains and, at the same time, issued a solemn decree forbidding all alienation of those domains. The Cardinals were bound by oath, from which they were never to seek absolution nor accept a dispensation, to resist with all their power any infringement of this decree in future.

We now come to an incident in the life of Saint Pius that portrays his character in a new light. We have seen how inflexible he could be when called upon to defend the truth against the insidious attacks of heretics and how much energy he displayed in combating the moral and social evils of his time. Yet, in his dealings with Elizabeth, the Apostate Queen of England, we are given a striking example of his forbearance and prudence, and also of his tenderness toward the oppressed of that unhappy realm. At the time Saint Pius ascended the Papal throne Elizabeth had been trying to uproot the Catholic faith within her domains for seven years. Still he withheld his hand, watching the tragedy deepen, as the unhappy nation accepted in sullen resentment the new religion forced upon it by fear and violence. In 1570 Saint Pius issued a Bull of excommunication and deposition against the Queen, separating her from the communion of the faithful, and absolving her subjects from their allegiance.

It will be remembered that Elizabeth's title was but a parliamentary one, since she was the illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, born during the lifetime of the true queen, and that subsequently, on Henry's marriage with Jane Seymour, she had been declared illegitimate by act of Parliament at her father's command. Nevertheless, she had taken the oath of Catholic sovereigns and promised to rule as a Catholic queen. Ten days after the coronation ceremonies, she began to legislate against Papal authority in England. Through Parliament she enacted laws whereby the reigning sovereign became the head of the Church in England—"Supreme Governor in all ecclesiastical and spiritual things as well as temporal." Mass was prohibited, Catholic Bishops deposed, imprisoned, or exiled. Before the first year of Elizabeth's reign was over the acts of Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole had "vanished like smoke," and, before ten years had passed, the Penal Laws were in full force. The words "Traitor" and "Catholic" had become synonymous and priests were hanged, drawn, and quartered for celebrating Mass. Protestantism, "by law established," had become the national religion. By her conduct, Elizabeth had proclaimed herself the determined adversary of the Catholic cause in England. She had also supported rebels against the Catholic sovereigns on the Continent. Pope Pius made every possible overture for a reconciliation. He had offered to legitimize her and to recognize her claim to the allegiance of her subjects, but all efforts were futile. She would do nothing more than ridicule the generous character of the Saint. Elizabeth was warned of the steps the Pope would take if the present state of affairs continued, but the warning fell on irresponsive ears.

In 1568 Queen Mary Stuart, Elizabeth's cousin, was driven from Scotland by the disloyalty of her subjects and sought refuge in England. There, in defiance of all justice and decency, she was thrown into prison, and from that time until her execution in 1587, she was the victim of plots, intrigues, and slander. Pope Pius had long taken a paternal interest in the widowed Queen, who had turned to him in her anguish, and with full confidence in his fatherly pity made known to him the treacherous and unnatural treatment she was receiving from the cruel and ambitious Elizabeth. The Pontiff's letters to the broken-hearted Mary Stuart are gems of rare and warm manifestations of sanctified tenderness. He granted her the privilege of receiving Holy Communion from her own hands, sending her a golden pyx containing consecrated hosts, and he appealed continually to the great Catholic powers to come to the rescue of the captive Queen, but all efforts were fruitless.

In October, 1569, an uprising took place in the North. Its primary object was the release of Mary Stuart, but prominently putting this idea forward would have been equivalent to signing her death warrant. Consequently, the proclamation merely stated that the Catholics had taken up arms in defense of the true religion. The insurrection failed miserably and was followed by severe punishment. More than eight hundred northern Catholics perished at the hands of the executioners.

A Bull of excommunication had been prepared for some time, but Pius deferred its promulgation, hoping Elizabeth would relent. At length, when the intelligence arrived of the failure of the insurrection and of the cruelties perpetrated by Elizabeth on the insurrectionists, Saint Pius deemed the time ripe for striking a decisive blow. He signed the Bull on the 25th of February, 1570, and ordered its promulgation. Three months later a copy of it was nailed to the door of the residence of the Protestant Bishop of London by John Felton, a Catholic. He was captured and put on the rack in the hope of forcing him to make known the name of the person from whom he received his commission. Upon his persistent refusal, he was subjected to other indignities and was finally hanged in Saint Paul's churchyard on August 8th. He has since been beatified.

Elizabeth professed to despise the sentence pronounced by the Pope. She thought it was connected with some plan of foreign invasion or domestic treason, declared it to be an insult to European sovereigns, and induced Maximilian II, of the Holy Roman Empire, to endeavor to have it withdrawn. To the solicitations of the Emperor, the Pope answered by asking whether Elizabeth deemed the sentence valid or invalid. If valid, why did she not seek a reconciliation with the Holy See? If invalid, why did she wish it revoked? The abusive language and revengeful threats of Elizabeth were unable to alter the Pope's decision, and the sentence remained.

That the Bull, as regards the deposition, failed in its effect, is not due to Pius, but to those temporal rulers who, nominally Catholic, passed it over in silence, ignoring it for motives of self-interest instead of uniting with the Holy See in enforcing it upon England. Temporal weapons were the only ones feared by Elizabeth, and the knowledge that the great powers of Europe stood prepared to support the Holy Father in his sentence against her would have brought her to her knees speedily, and certainly would have changed the course of English history.

Spain also contributed much to the ever-accumulating anxieties of the Supreme Pontiff. There, the Inquisition had become a secular tribunal, deriving its authority from the King, and its judgments were often far different from what they would have been had the Church guided its proceedings. The odium of many of its acts fell on religion and it was often imperative on Rome to clear up the mistake.

The Pope tried to persuade Charles IX of France to use the sword only in the interests of peace and to exercise the virtues of regal justice and mercy, virtues that are so important in a ruling monarch at all times, but especially when the wild passions of men are let loose, as was the case during the Huguenot uprising. Unfortunately the influence of Catherine de Medici proved fatal to the great good that should have resulted had the Pope's instructions been followed. Yet there can be no doubt that, were it not for the unwearied exertions of the Supreme Pontiff, turbulence and irreligion would have had a far more demoralizing influence.

Saint Pius also devoted much time to America, then but recently discovered. His great care there was to aid those devoted bands of missionaries (Benedictines, Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans) who were wearing out their lives in conflicts with ignorance and vice on the very frontiers of Christendom. The natives listened eagerly to the voice of the missionaries who preached the Christian faith to them. Yet, when they saw the evil lives of many Christians, they concluded that a religion that produced such evil results could never have come from heaven. Thus, the noble efforts of the missionaries were thwarted by the cruelty and wickedness of European Christians. Bartholomeo de Las Casas, an eminent Dominican missionary of the South, complained bitterly that the vices of the European settlers greatly hindered the spread of Christianity among the natives. He begged the Pope to use his influence with the temporal rulers so they should restrain the guilty. Hence, the Pontiff wrote the Catholic sovereigns of Europe, imploring them to reign as vice-regents of the King of Kings and to encourage the propagation of the Catholic faith in their new western dominions.

From the internal wounds of Christendom, the watchful eye of its Father turned to the dangers that threatened it from without. In the Far East, Solymarl the Magnificent, Sultan of the Turks, was carefully watching every movement of his Christian neighbors. He hailed with exceeding satisfaction the appearance of Luther, whom he took to be a new prophet sent at the prayer of Mahomet to be an aid toward the subjugation of Christendom by the Mussulman armies. It is difficult in these days, when the Mussulman Empire lies an inert mass at the threshold of Christendom, to realize the terror of its name in the days of Pius V. At that time, the Mediterranean was covered with Mussulman fleets, Greece and Hungary were under its dominion, and the conquest of Malta and Cyprus were the only obstacles to its advance upon Italy.

The Knights of Malta heroically guarded the outposts assigned to them as a barrier against the inroads of the fanatical Turks. They were truly chivalrous champions of God, men after the heart of Saint Pius. Yet, the day came when it was clear that the gallant force was so weakened by the toll it had paid to the ferocity of its assailants that the next attack of the enemy would crush these valiant defenders of Catholic peace. A massacre of the garrison would surely follow the surrender of Malta and, without prompt relief, the island could not hold out. The Grand Master of the Order, John de la Valette, sent word to the Pope, explaining the situation, and asking if he should abandon the island and retreat to Sicily while there was yet time. "No," came the answer from Pius V. "Remain at your glorious post. Willingly would I hasten to die, God permitting, at your side. As duty binds us here, we will call on Christendom to take our place in this God-crowned warfare, and while we open the spiritual treasures of the Church with liberal hand to your auxiliaries, we shall also afford you all the temporal help in our power, praying the Divine Omnipotence to guard you." By means of the money and troops sent by the Pope, the danger was averted for the time being.

Under Selim II, however, the progress of the Turks became more alarming than ever. They had taken Cyprus with the active cooperation of the Greek population of the island, and were massacring the Latin nobility and clergy. Yet the Saint found it impossible to move Christendom to its own defense. In 1570, he sent Cardinal legates to every court, except England, to preach a crusade and to beg for ships, men, and money. Every court but Spain returned an excuse. At length by dint of effort, Pius succeeded in forming a league between Spain, Venice, and the Holy See. Don John of Austria was appointed Commander-in-Chief. Saint Pius assured him that “if relying on divine grace, rather than on human help, he attacked the enemy, God would not be wanting to His own cause.” He enjoined the officers to look to the good conduct of their troops, to suppress swearing, gaming, riot, and plunder, and thereby render themselves deserving of victory. A fast of three days was proclaimed for the success of the enterprise and the Rosary was to be recited everyday on board the ships. All the men went to confession, received Holy Communion, and took advantage of the plentiful indulgences the Pope attached to the expedition. The Forty Hours Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was ordered in all the churches of Rome, during which the Rosary was to be recited aloud. A universal jubilee also was published to draw down God’s blessing on the Christian army.

On the afternoon of October 7, 1571, the Christian fleet, consisting of 210 vessels, met, and engaged in, one of the decisive battles of the world—against the Ottoman fleet, numbering about 300 ships, under command of Ali Pasha. During the night preceding the battle and all through the day itself the aged Pontiff, aged and broken in health as he was, passed in fasting and prayer; thus, like another Moses, he prayed while the armies of God fought. All through the city, the monasteries and colleges were also in prayer. As the evening advanced, and he was in anxious consultation with some officials of the Papal Court, he suddenly paused and began to pray. His serious emaciated countenance, lined with care and responsibility, grew flushed with the fervor of his petition. Then rising he went to the window that overlooked the Campagna and gazed silently across the blue distance.

All at once, his countenance lit up with an expression of joy and a murmur of thanksgiving parted his lips; then, turning to his attendants, he said, “This is no time for business; go, return thanks to the Lord God. In this very hour our fleet has engaged the Turks and is victorious.” He then dismissed his attendants, and threw himself upon his knees, while tears of gratitude for so signal a victory coursed down his cheeks. The date and hour of this prophecy were carefully noted by the Cardinals, and it proved to be the decisive moment in which the Christian fleet triumphed over the Turks in the Bay of Lepanto.



Pope Pius V's Vision of the Victory at Lepanto

Painting by Lazzaro Baldi (1624–1703), an Italian painter of the Baroque period. This painting was completed in Rome around 1673. It is located at the Ghislieri College of Pavia, where Pope Saint Pius V taught theology. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original two-dimensional work of art and is in the public domain.*



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It was near the end of October before Contarini, the messenger from the fleet, reached Rome with tidings of the victory. He arrived at midnight and was immediately admitted into the presence of the Pope. When the Saint heard all the particulars of the glorious and complete victory, he fell on his knees, crying out in the fullness of his heart, "He hath regarded the prayer of the humble and He hath not despised their petition. Let these things be written unto another generation, and the people to be created shall praise the Lord."

Upward of thirty thousand Turks lost their lives in the battle, ten thousand were made prisoners, and almost their whole fleet was taken, while fifteen thousand Christian prisoners were liberated. The Crusaders lost seven thousand five hundred men. This was the turning point of Turkish invasion into Europe. They lost prestige and self-confidence, and from then on their power gradually declined.

In memory of this unparalleled victory, and in gratitude to our Blessed Lady for her powerful intercession in behalf of the Christian forces, Saint Pius inserted the words, "Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis," "Help of Christians, pray for us," in her Litanies. He also ordered that thenceforward the commemorative feast of Our Lady of Victories should be observed on the anniversary of the battle, October 7th. Pope Gregory XIII changed the title of the feast to that of Our Lady of the Rosary, and appointed the first Sunday of October (Rosary Sunday) for its celebration.

When considering the immense amount of work that fell to Saint Pius as Pope, one is naturally led to inquire what time could he possibly give to the care of his own soul? Engaged unceasingly in attending to the wants of others or to the affairs of State, it would seem he could give but little time to private devotion. This, indeed, was not the case. The early hours of the day were given to prayer and meditation. He celebrated Mass very early in the morning and with such fervor as to greatly edify all who assisted at it. After Mass, he spent a long time in thanksgiving and meditation, often becoming so absorbed in God that his attendants were obliged to pull him by his habit when they had occasion to speak to him. He studied the Scriptures every day and read some portion of the Life of Saint Dominic some other Saint, preferably of the Dominican Order. His devotion to the Rosary was very great. He recited it unfailingly each day, and published decrees confirming the privileges granted to the Rosary Confraternity. The following is a quotation taken from one of these decrees. "Inspired, as is believed, by the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Dominic, Founder of the Order of Friar Preachers, on an occasion similar to this in which we now find ourselves, at a time when heresy blinded a great number of souls, turning his eyes toward heaven, where the Blessed Virgin reigns, conceived a very easy way, within the reach of all, to propitiate the Mother of God by the recitation of her

Rosary or Psalter. We ourselves also turn to that mountain whence cometh our help in the midst of our sorrows, and we tenderly exhort all the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, in the Name of the Lord, to follow this example.”

He prayed fervently for the dead and often declared that he had received marvelous assistance in his greatest needs through that devotion. At times when troubles accumulated, he loved to ponder on the spirit of the Martyrs of Rome, toward whom he was especially devoted. It is said that once, when asked by a stranger for some relic to take back home, the Pope bade him take a handful of the dry earth at his feet. The stranger, not wishing to offend the Pontiff by refusing the proffered gift, did as he was bidden, and found to his astonishment that it stained his scarf with blood. The Saint then informed him that the ground upon which he stood had been saturated with the blood of Martyrs.

He began to grant audiences early in the day to those who had business with him. Frequently, these audiences were so numerous that it was late in the evening before he could dismiss the last one. To gain time, he sometimes admitted ambassadors and men of important affairs during his meals. Early in the morning, it was usual to see groups of strangers, or even ecclesiastics, wending their way by torchlight through the narrow streets of Rome to the Vatican to secure an audience with the Pope. He gave one day each month exclusively to the poor, whom he received with such kindness, and listened so patiently to all they had to say, that when he could not grant what they asked they could see it was a great grief to him to refuse their petitions.

Throughout his whole life, Saint Pius was remarkable for his austerity, and toward the end of his career, he became more and more self-denying. He suffered extremely from gravel, but offered the pain as a penance for his sins and firmly refused all remedies, from which his modesty shrank. When suffering the tortures of this painful malady he would invariably drag himself slowly to kneel before his crucifix and repeat the prayer, “Lord increase my pains, but increase also my patience.” He could never be prevailed upon to take the nourishing food recommended by his physicians. His repast consisted of eggs and wild chicory or some other bitter herb, and he forbade all seasoning of it. On fasting days, he did not consider this austerity severe enough, but ate only once, and limited the number of glasses of water he drank.

He listened humbly to reproofs given by ill-tempered subjects, and afterward thanked them for the service they had rendered. He one day pardoned a libertine who had lampooned him, saying, “My friend, I would have punished you if you had insulted the Pope, but since you attacked only Michael Ghislieri, go in peace.” His humility made him wish to abdicate. When he announced his intention of doing so and to retiring to the Dominican monastery at Bosco, his native village, to end his life in prayer and meditation, his spiritual adviser and the Cardinal, overcame his resolutions by

representing to him that God had entrusted to him the guidance of His Church, and that it was his duty not to abandon it. He little loved the honors that his exalted dignity merited for him, regarding all such things as painful thorns, useful only for warning him of the peril in which he was placed. He often declared that he had not a single moment of peace since becoming Pope; also that he was worthy of compassion. He bitterly repented having accepted a charge he considered so far above his abilities.

Six months after the Battle of Lepanto, Pius V lay on his death-bed. He had been suffering uncomplainingly for years, but at this stage of his life his painful malady increased rapidly. At the beginning of Lent he, although his weakness was very great, began to fast as though he were in sound health. His attendants, wishing to keep him alive, mixed gravy with the vegetables he ate, but as soon as he tasted the flavor of meat he said, "Would you wish me, during the short time I have to live, to break the laws which I have always kept and God has given me the grace to keep for fifty-three years?"

March of 1572 found him failing fast, and he often had to deny himself the consolation of saying Mass. On such occasions Holy Communion was brought to him by his nephew, Cardinal Alessandrino, an heir alike to his name and virtues, and for hours afterward he would remain in a transport of love, from which he could be recalled only with difficulty.

Public audiences were suspended, to allow him to spend the days yet left to him in preparing for eternity. Suspension of the audiences led to a report being spread abroad that he was dead. Consequently, the city was filled with mourning and lamentations. The Pope was deeply moved on hearing of the grief of his children. He felt that his first words as their Sovereign had been a true prophecy, and that his people would mourn for him as their friend and father rather than as their ruler, and wished to give them his pontifical blessing once more. Hence on Easter Sunday, conquering the mortal weakness that was creeping over him, he robed himself in full pontificals, had himself carried to the balcony above the entrance to Saint Peter's, and there solemnly blessed the assembled crowds. A deputation of the clergy and Roman nobles then waited on him to offer congratulations on his supposed recovery, but the Saint quickly told them of his real state. "My children," he said, "I have no longer any business to transact except with God. The account which I shall soon have to render to Him of all the deeds and words of my life requires me to employ all the powers of my soul to prepare for it."

To the consternation of his friends, and contrary to the advice of his physicians, he insisted on paying a farewell visit to the seven Basilicas of Rome and to the Scala Sancta. He set out on foot, upheld by the arms of his assistants. More than once he halted as though the agony of death were mastering him, but, murmuring feebly, "He who can do all things will finish the work He has begun," continued his journey, thus following his "Via Crucis" to the end.

On his return to the Vatican, he was told that a number of English Catholics had come to seek shelter at Rome from the persecution of the tyrant Elizabeth. He desired to see them, made anxious inquiries concerning the state of Catholics in England, and charged his nephew to supply all their wants. As they left the room, he was heard to say, "My God, Thou knowest that I have ever been ready to shed my blood for the salvation of that nation."

On the 30th of April he announced that his hours were numbered, and asked the Bishop of Segia to administer to him the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and from that time on the little strength that remained to him ebbed swiftly away. Once, when everyone present believed him to have passed away, he revived, and with an animation wonderful in a dying man said to the bystanders, "If you love my mortal life, full of so many miseries, you ought much more to love that unchangeable and blessed life which by the grace of God I hope soon to enjoy in heaven. You know well that the greatest wish of my life has been to conserve in its purity the deposit of faith, to overthrow the empire of the infidels, and to extend the Kingdom of God upon earth. But my sins and crimes have proved obstacles to the attainment of my wishes. I adore the depths of the judgments of God and acknowledge myself to be His unprofitable steward. It only remains for me to recommend to you, with all my soul, that same Church which God committed to my care. Do your utmost to elect a successor full of zeal for the glory of God, who will be attached to no other interest in the world, and who will seek nothing but the welfare of Christianity."

When he had uttered these words a little incident occurred which shows the delicate perfection of his chastity. In the movement of his arms, one of them became bare. This wounded his natural purity, and he quickly tried to cover it again with the sleeve of his woolen tunic.

He died on the first day of May, 1572. His feast is celebrated on May 5th. The heroic virtues that he practiced throughout his eventful career, and the miracles wrought during his lifetime and through his intercession after death, merited for him a place in the calendar of Saints. He is known and venerated as Saint Pius the Fifth, the last of the canonized Popes.*

* Since this book was first published, Pope Saint Pius X (1903-1914) was canonized in 1954.



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